

4 Perspectives of Armed Struggle

On 16 December 1961 organized units of Umkhonto We Sizwe ('The Spear of The Nation' - MK) formed on the initiative of the ANC and SACP, carried out bomb attacks against Government installations in every major South African city. These attacks were the first in the modern period to give public notice that radical change would be sought by a strategy which included organized violence. There were to be over 150 acts of sabotage during the following eighteen months. In a proclamation widely distributed on the day of the first acts of sabotage, MK declared: 'The people's patience is not endless. The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices - submit or fight. That time has now come in South Africa.'

Had that time come? Was the moment of action well chosen; and, if so, was the method used appropriate? Did the leadership have a strategy other than an immediate expression of militant anger? Was the movement in a state of readiness sufficient to safeguard its units and personnel against massive enemy reprisals, which should undoubtedly have been anticipated?

In attempting to answer questions of this type, those whose vocation is only to dispense praise or censure have an obvious advantage over those who acted: the advantage of knowing the result. In Clausewitz's perceptive aphorism:

The state of circumstances from which an event proceeded can never be placed before the eye of the critic exactly as it lay before the eye of the person acting, [... because, above all ..], it is almost impossible that the knowledge of (the result) should not have an effect on the judgement passed on events which preceded it. Examining only the result of M K sabotage in its narrow immediate sense, critics who have turned their pens to this period have had a gala day. The form of violence chosen was, by its nature, restricted. Sabotage of property, even on a more sophisticated scale than M K was capable of mounting, is at best a weapon auxiliary to revolutionary armed struggle. It could neither bring about the downfall of the government, nor draw into action those not already in the fairly small conspiratorial groups of activists.

The organized beginnings of sabotage, and the semi-spontaneous terrorist outbursts of the PAC-inspired Poqo in 1962, acted however as a spur to government counter-action, culminating in blows which led to the virtual destruction of all effective levels of leadership and organization within the country.

The police raid on the Rivonia headquarters of South Africa's underground and its follow-up resulted in the arrest and imprisonment of almost the whole of the liberation movement's internal leadership and activist rank-and-file. The state security structure, refashioned to counter threatened insurgency, succeeded in silencing all significant liberation opposition. In the period that followed, those leaders who had previously been selected for external

missions together with the MK cadres sent abroad for military training, continued to make renewed efforts to get the struggle off the ground.

HAD THE TIME COME?

In the early sixties, all sections of South Africa's liberation movement believed that a move towards armed struggle was a revolutionary imperative. By then the strategy of mass struggle along non-violent lines had exhausted its potential for mobilizing the people. The regime had turned to the use of undisguised terror against all militant opposition to race rule; the liberation organizations had been outlawed. These facts had put paid to any lingering illusions that radical change could be won by action which did not include armed activity.

The formal turning point from the old to the new strategy was the regime's massive mobilization of armed force to frustrate the liberation movement's last attempt in May 1961 to pursue old-style tactics, in the call for a general strike to protest against the declaration of a Republic without consulting the black majority. It became clear that old methods would no longer strike a chord amongst the people. Like the workers in Russia in the wake of the 1905 revolution, the peaceful strike and the demonstration.

ceased to satisfy the workers; they asked: what is to be done next . . .? The proletariat sensed sooner than the leaders the change in the objective conditions of struggle . . . as is always the case practice marched ahead of theory.²

Events outside South Africa also played an important part in developing a more offensive mood amongst the people, and stimulated a search for a new strategy to destroy minority rule 'in our lifetime'.. The international isolation of South Africa was reaching a high point. In Africa itself direct imperialist control of the continent was being undermined; one country after another was obtaining independence; the prospects of self-rule were firing the imagination of people throughout Africa, the South included. Friendly borders were creeping closer to the beleaguered South and, with these, the prospect of vital practical aid from the newly emergent states. For the first time in modern Africa successful armed struggles were being waged, first in Algeria; then in Guinea-Bissau and Angola, and later in Mozambique; in these areas armed national liberation forces could be seen to be challenging enemies with overwhelmingly superior military and material resources.

Untimely inaction can often be as politically damaging as untimely action. There can be no doubt that in late 1961, failure by the ANC and its allies to make a public break with the tactics of the previous decade would have been seen by their supporters as 'inaction' - and as an abdication of their leadership role. But if a sharp break with previous tactics was called for, could the perspective of armed struggle reasonably be placed on the agenda? And were the initial techniques for doing so adequate or correct? Before we can answer these questions, we must first consider the general place of armed tactics in the struggle for revolutionary change.

INSURRECTION AND ARMED STRUGGLE

It is necessary to separate two distinct problems. *The first* relates to what may broadly be called 'a revolutionary situation', in which revolution involving armed uprising is properly on the agenda. The *second* relates to the use of organized violence as part of a planned build-up towards a protracted people's war. A confusion of these two concepts has sometimes prevented a revolutionary movement from seeing the revolutionary possibilities of its own situation. Recent history has provided a number of examples of revolutionary parties which rejected military activity because they did not discriminate between the separate questions, and paid dearly in consequence. In Algeria, for instance, the beginning of armed activity took the Algerian Communist Party by surprise; it regarded the launching of the national liberation war in November 1954 as premature, since 'the conditions for an armed uprising as formulated by Lenin did not exist'.³

Lenin's formulation is presumably that in '*Left-Wing' Communism - An Infantile Disorder*:

*It is not enough for revolution that the exploited and oppressed masses should understand the impossibility of living the old way and demand changes; it is essential for revolution that the exploiters should not be able to live and rule in the old way ... revolution is impossible without a nation-wide crisis (affecting both the exploited and the exploiters.)*⁴

Lenin was here discussing the problems of a general insurrection or uprising at that time in the advanced or relatively advanced capitalist countries. He was not stating a law. He was always at pains to emphasize that the general theory and practice of communism must be adapted to specific conditions. The solution to problems of the colonial areas, 'You will not find in any communist book ... you will have to tackle that problem and solve it through your independent experience.'⁵

In his formulation in '*Left-Wing' Communism*, Lenin did not deal with the question of whether a vanguard organization could help create favourable conditions for the conquest of power by its own activities. He was dealing with the objective conditions themselves. But this has not always been appreciated. Of course favourable conditions for armed struggle ripen historically. But the historical process should not be regarded as a mystical force outside of man, which in a crude deterministic way sets him tasks to which he mechanically responds. Simply to sit back and await the evolution of the objective conditions for a 'revolutionary situation' can amount to a dereliction of leadership. What people in organized activities do or abstain from doing, hastens or retards the historical process, and helps or hinders the maturing of favourable conditions for 'successful armed struggle.

On the continent of Africa there have been - or are - people's armed struggles in Algeria, Guinea-Bissau, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Namibia. In none of these territories can it be claimed that hostilities started in a classical situation either of revolutionary crisis or when a general insurrection could be immediately anticipated. Yet a combination of internal non-armed strategy used to exhaustion, and favourable external conditions made it possible for armed activity to promote a revolutionary advance.

Although no single incident provides the sole point of departure from non-armed to armed conflict, in each country one can recognise an event or a sequence of events which

dramatically signalled the need for fundamentally new approaches. In Guinea-Bissau the signal event was the bloody repression of the August 1959 strike at the Pidgiguiti docks of Bissau, in which fifty workers were killed and many injured. In Mozambique it was the 1960 Mueda massacre of 600 at a peaceful meeting. In Angola it was the killing of thirty and the wounding of 200 at a meeting in Catete to protest at the arrest of the MPLA leader Agostinho Neto, combined with brutal repression of the Maria uprising led by a militant Christian sect. In Zimbabwe serious preparations for armed struggle were prompted by the settlers' successful Unilateral Declaration of Independence, which shattered any remaining illusion that Britain might act against the interest of its 'kith and kin' to enforce majority rule. In Namibia, the turn to armed resistance occurred immediately after the abortive 1966 judgment of the International Court of Justice, when the process of international and legal pressure had been tested to its limits and found wanting.

These examples must not be taken to support the dangerous illusion that in any country in which there is severe repression, the mere injection of armed groups will of itself, and subject only to the professional skill of the armed groups, slowly spread revolution like an oil patch. They do, however, make clear that, *given certain minimum pre-conditions*, the actual commencement and continuation of violent action can hasten the development of insurrectionary conditions.* What are these pre-conditions, particularly in a colonial-type situation?

**It is a matter of historical record that in many colonial countries, the commencement of organized armed activities did not take the form of an armed uprising in the classical sense; nor did it wait upon the time when it could properly be claimed that there existed a 'nation-wide crisis affecting both the exploiters and the exploited'. It would be difficult, if not altogether impossible, to find in China in the early 1920s, Algeria in 1954, or Cuba in 1958 a traditional type of revolutionary upsurge to provide a classical basis for armed activities. In these countries protracted armed activity undoubtedly played the major role in bringing about the conditions for nation-wide revolutionary upsurge and eventual victory.*

First, disillusionment (based on hard experience), amongst the majority of the people, with the prospect of achieving liberation by traditional and non-violent processes. *Second*, the readiness of the people to respond to the call for armed confrontation, at the beginning in the form of sympathy and later with practical support. *Third*, the existence of a leadership capable not only of gaining the peoples organized allegiance for armed struggle, but of carrying out the immensely difficult tasks of planning, preparing and directing the conduct of the whole struggle.

There are, of course, other factors: such as the international context in which the struggle takes place, and. the physical possibilities (terrain, friendly borders, availability of trained personnel and arms, etc.) Whether a propitious situation exists in any given country cannot be determined solely by reference to generalized theoretical models. In each case it is for the indigenous political activists who are intimately involved in the special complexities of their situation, to assess what is possible.

Of course, no political struggle (and this is what people's armed struggle essentially is) can be taken up only on condition that its success can be guaranteed. In the South African case, some serious mistakes were made, which proved all too costly. But if assessing these mistakes is not just an exercise in criticism, but an aid to future conduct, it should avoid seeing the struggle as a purely subjective process in which all reverses are due to avoidable errors. The real world in which struggle takes place is not a laboratory model.* We must never forget that events which are now well behind us were at one stage ahead, and that those who acted did not have then - as they have now - the benefit of experience.

**'World history would indeed be very easy to make if the struggle were taken up only on condition of infallibly favourable chances.' - Karl Marx in a letter to L. Kugelman, 17 April 1871.*

THE SIXTIES - A FORWARD LOOK

In South Africa during the early sixties, there could not be a strategy for the immediate unleashing of an armed struggle; there was a gap between the people's disenchantment with exclusively non-violent methods, and their readiness and capacity to storm the citadels of the enemy. That gap could not be bridged merely by brave calls to action. Sabotage by selected units was therefore considered to be the proper departure point of the new liberation strategy. It was not presented as an ultimate weapon in people's war; nor as a form of physical pressure which, on its own, could gather force so as to create a climate of crisis and collapse in the enemy camp. It was designed rather to meet the specific ideological and practical needs of the new direction of struggle in the conditions of that time.

It was vital that the political leadership demonstrate that it was placing before the people new perspectives which would mark a sharp and open break with the politics of non-violent resistance that had dominated the preceding half century or more. Inside the movement the ideological momentum of the previous period was still evident. Strong voices continued to echo the hope that the old techniques could still succeed without resort to armed confrontation. Although calls for old-style actions were attracting a diminishing response from the people, the alternative strategy had still to gain currency. The people had experienced escalating state violence in every peaceful campaign of the fifties, and on more than one occasion had reacted with spontaneous counter-violence. But riot and head-on clash by enraged crowds with state forces was little more than a transient reflex. It did not - and could not - provide the basis for an effective armed challenge. A new approach was necessary: The strategy adopted, and the structure devised to implement it, envisaged a long term, multi-staged campaign of disciplined violence in which a hard core of trained militants, supported by mass-based political activity and crucial external aid, confront state power with the ultimate goal of seizing it.⁶

To lay the foundations for this strategy, the ANC and its allies publicly launched the first phase: 'controlled violence' in the form of the sabotage campaign. Politically the campaign was designed to serve a number of purposes. It would be a graphic pointer to the need for carefully planned action rather than spontaneous or terroristic acts of retaliation. And it would demonstrate that responsibility for the slide towards bloody civil war lay squarely with the regime. A proclamation accompanying the first sabotage acts declared:

We of Umkhonto We Sizwe have always sought to achieve liberation without bloodshed and civil clash. We hope, even at this late hour, that our first actions will awaken everyone to a realization of the disastrous situation to which the Nationalist policy is leading. We hope that we will bring the government and its supporters to their senses before it is too late, so that both the government and its policies can be changed before matters reach the desperate stage of civil war.⁷

However forlorn the hope, its expression - backed up by a form of violence which deliberately avoided the taking of life was a politically useful bridge between the period of non-violent campaigning and the future people's armed struggle.

But another need had also to be met. If the armed tactic was to play a part in the political struggle, it was necessary to begin building a revolutionary armed force, under the overall leadership and direction of the political movement but with a distinctive apparatus and function. The sabotage campaign thus became a proving ground for establishing which activists of the existing organizations could make the transitions to the new tactics; and, by means of these acts of armed propaganda, the atmosphere was created in which other young militants would be inspired to join.

That sabotage was to form only the opening phase in the unfolding of armed struggle is revealed by other steps which were taken at the same time. Before MK was formed, leading personnel had been sent out of the country to be trained in the art of guerrilla struggle. An intensive drive had been initiated for the recruitment of large numbers of other cadres; and an underground railway had been set up which carried hundreds of recruits abroad for guerrilla-type instruction. Early in 1962 almost immediately after the beginnings of sabotage – Nelson Mandela had toured Africa and Europe to obtain support for the armed struggle and training facilities for guerrillas; efforts afterwards continued by the external missions of the ANC and its allies.

At the same time the National High Command of MK elaborated an ambitious plan to prepare for the next phase, the initiation of guerrilla warfare. The plan envisaged the establishment of MK regions in urban and rural areas, each with full time organizers. It included the mobilization of both home and foreign resources to enable trained personnel with their equipment to return to chosen strategic areas. These trained cadres, acting together with a local network which the High Command would build in the interim, would form the hard-core of guerrilla activity. Emphasis would be placed on the country areas in the initial stages. All these technical and organizational measures would be accompanied by an intensive campaign of mass mobilization by the political organizations which, for tactical reasons, did not yet publicly admit M K to be their creation. The precise timing of guerrilla action would depend on implementation of the preparatory steps, although the euphoric mood led to unreal expectations.

The draft document (Operation Mayibuye) which set out the main elements of the plan emphasized that the struggle ahead was likely to be protracted, and that there would be tremendous difficulties in acting against a state which was powerfully armed and could rely on the support of the indigenous white population. But it declared, 'the time for small thinking is

over because history leaves us no choice'. The successful beginnings of guerrilla warfare could well lead to a collapse of the state structure 'far sooner than we can at the moment envisage'. As it turned out, that speculation could not be tested. Although some aspects of the strategy contained in Operation Mayibuye were implemented - the most successful being the training abroad of large groups of MK cadres - it is now a matter of history that its main purpose was completely frustrated; and the enemy's reprisals rendered the whole movement abysmally weak in the years that followed.

It is vital to identify the main reasons why this happened, not merely for purposes of historical record, but because the experiences have obvious relevance to present day endeavours. Given the imperative of armed struggle in South Africa, the broad conception behind the plan cannot be faulted. The plan had been prepared by the MK High Command and its details were still being discussed by the political leadership when it was captured at Rivonia. Whether then, now, or in the future, there can be no strategy for commitment to guerrilla-type struggle in South Africa without the main steps which the plan envisaged: the training of sufficient skilled military personnel which, in the absence of liberated areas, could only be effectively done outside the country; their return to selected regions; their equipment with a reserve of weapons to sustain operations in the initial period; and the preparation of organized political and military support for them amongst the people, especially in the areas selected for the first actions. Indeed, this was the pattern in Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique, and also of the beginnings of armed conflict in Zimbabwe and Namibia. But it is now clear that the objective obstacles to the implementation of such a plan in the 1963 South African situation were not properly appreciated.

THE EXTERNAL FACTORS

In the special conditions in which struggles on the African continent have had to be initiated and pursued, the external element was and continues to be a crucial factor. The support of the socialist world and of contiguous countries (as, for example, Guinea next door to Guinea-Bissau; Tanzania and Zambia adjoining Mozambique and Angola; the Caprivi Strip as an entry point to Namibia; and the liberated territories of Mozambique for freedom fighters striking into Rhodesia) has enabled the liberation movements to start the early phases of armed struggle sooner than would otherwise have been possible. In each of these territories; the initial phases of armed action could not have been organized from inside the countries themselves. Leaderships had to be constituted externally, and in this opening phase, supplies and trained personnel had to flow into the country from outside.

In the case of Guinea-Bissau, the decisive step was the installation of a leadership group in the newly independent Republic of Guinea in 1961, where the basic PAIGC 'core, both political and military, was formed.⁸ For Angola it was only after Congo-Brazzaville granted haven to the MPLA leadership in 1963, following the overthrow of the puppet French regime of Abbe Youlou, that MPLA was able to begin in earnest the long task of reconstructing their forces in friendly territory.⁹ Another decisive break-through was the opening of the Eastern Front made possible by Zambian support. In the case of Mozambique, the early beginnings of FRELIMO were at a congress in Tanzania in 1962 of three organizations, all exile-based. Tanzanian facilities, encouragement and unstinting support contributed immeasurably to FRELIMO's ability to begin guerrilla struggle and to sustain it for ten years.

In the South African case there were not then in existence any contiguous friendly states with the capacity to risk open confrontation with the strong racist regime. South Africa was surrounded by a *cordon sanitaire* of states which stood in alliance with white supremacy or, like Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland, were still hostages to its economic and military power. For the liberation movement this made the vital link between internal and external resources extremely complex. As it turned out, this complexity was underestimated; and, at the same time, the prospects of assistance from independent Africa on the required scale were overestimated. Indeed, the O AU had to accommodate itself to a unity which incorporated disparate levels of commitment to the anti-imperialist struggle. As a consequence, the ANC often received less assistance and facilities than the amount needed to implement its projects. It thus found itself in the vicious circle where its inability to begin armed actions was used as a justification for only lukewarm support, which in turn, made the task even more difficult.

Also over-optimistic was the assessment of the likely effect of the campaign to isolate and weaken the South African regime. For example, in 1963, the SACP Central Committee claimed that:

Looked at from the viewpoint of the historical process, the South African regime is steadily and swiftly being driven into a position of isolation in which the armaments, capital and other forms of material and moral support which sustain it from abroad will one after another be cut short.¹⁰

Though the level of its own support was thus overestimated, the tenacity of external imperialist economic and military support for the racist regime was under-estimated.

THE INTERNAL FACTORS

Although of some importance, the external factor is only one aspect of the problem. It is obvious that both then and now the progress of the struggle depends essentially upon political organization within the country and its capacity to mobilize internal revolutionary energies.

But every attempt to raise a struggle to a higher level involves new complexities and creates new dangers for both the organization and its membership. In answer to those who looked only to the organizational disasters which followed the armed struggle in the 1905 revolution, Lenin said:

Every new form of struggle, accompanied as it is by new dangers and new sacrifices inevitably 'disorganizes' organizations which are unprepared for this new form of struggle. Our propagandist circles were disorganized by recourse to methods of agitation. Our Committees were subsequently disorganized by recourse to demonstrations. Every military action in any war to a certain extent disorganizes the ranks of the fighters. But this does not mean that one must not fight. It means that one must learn to fight. That is all.¹¹

He went on to point out that what would have disorganized the movement even more than organized guerrilla warfare, would have been the absence of resistance altogether. The same

could well be said of South Africa. But it is nevertheless of capital importance for the future of the South African struggle to pinpoint those errors and misjudgements which contributed to the regime's successful counter-offensive.

In retrospect the main weaknesses are now apparent. First, the movement's own security screen which had seemed adequate in the previous period (despite ten years of illegal activity, the SACP, for example, did not suffer a single casualty until 1962), proved inadequate after the regime had refashioned its own instruments to meet the new challenge. The immunity of the earlier period had bred a mood of carelessness and bravado which was, in the end, to prove costly. The majority of leaders and rank-and-filers taking part in illegal activity were well known to the authorities from the period of open public campaigning, and very few of them 'went underground' in the sense of changing their existing identities and operating under a protective security screen. Only a few, like Mandela and Sisulu, went into hiding. But even their safety was daily threatened by their regular contact with others who were equally vulnerable, but who continued to lead their normal lives.

By mid-1963 the Rivonia underground headquarters had become a point of security weakness to the whole movement. The organizational nerve centre of the struggle came to be centred around this one headquarters; and there the lines of demarcation between the political and the military organizations became impermissibly blurred. The site of headquarters became known to more and more cadres who were drawn into its Underground work. Decisions were taken from time to time to remove the headquarters, and to disperse some of its activities; but, influenced by a long period of safe operation which bred an unjustified contempt for the enemy's security police techniques, the implementation of these decisions lacked the necessary urgency. In June 1963 a well-prepared police raid on Rivonia resulted in the arrest of all the top leaders and the capture of valuable archives. This was followed by the rounding up of numerous other members of the ANC and MK whose detention and torture under the infamous 90-day law led to further successes by the security forces. South Africa's judicial framework, with all its inequalities, had up to then provided a degree of protection for those who fell into police hands. The new laws and interrogation techniques (learnt from the French army in Algeria and from the Portuguese political police) gave the security forces a charter to force information out of those detained. Many resisted bravely but the majority who were subjected to standing torture, sleep deprivation and similar methods proved unable to resist.,

Since casualties are unavoidable, it is a basic rule of conspiratorial work that the destructive effect be contained within the smallest possible limits. Those who take part in such work should obviously know only what is absolutely necessary for the performance of their tasks. This rule too was infringed, and thus successful interrogation under torture of many of those detained set up a chain reaction which made it easier for the security forces to immobilize almost every level of the movement's apparatus.

In the political sphere, too, distortions crept in. The commencement of armed struggle tends to monopolize more and more of the energies and resources of a movement, especially one unpractised in the art of the new strategy. It therefore requires a deliberate effort to ensure that the mass political and organizational factors are not, directly or indirectly, belittled. In the South Africa case, the energies and resources devoted to the planning and execution of acts of sabotage and to the military apparatus (and all its auxiliary requirements) began to affect the

pace of political work amongst the people. If anything, the new strategy called for an intensification of mass propaganda and organization. In the words of Giap:

If insurrection is said to be an art, the main intent of this art is to know how to give to the struggle forms appropriate to the political situation at each stage, how to maintain the correct relation between forms of political struggle and those of armed struggle in each period. At the beginning the political struggle is the main task, the armed struggle a secondary one.¹²

In South Africa in the early sixties the increasing concentration of the liberation movements on military preparation helped to generate an attitude both within the organization and amongst the people that the fate of the struggle depended upon the sophisticated actions of a professional conspiratorial elite. The importance of the mass base was theoretically appreciated; but in practice mass political work was minimal. This attitude was to persist for some years after 1963 with propaganda tending to say too little about what initiatives people should be taking, and to treat them only as support groups for guerrilla units which would soon appear amongst them.

THE PROBLEMS OF THE POST-RIVONIA PERIOD

A few brave efforts were made inside the country after 1963 to create a new internal structure, but in the decade that followed the task of propaganda, reconstruction and further preparations for armed activities were assumed by the exile leadership. The fact that, during this period, there was no effective leadership centre within the country also generated its own special problems: not least in the lack of intimate contact by the exile leadership with internal conditions and with the state of consciousness of the people, which effective revolutionary leadership demands.

From 1966 onwards, internal ANC and SACP propaganda once again appeared regularly, and numerous efforts were made to return trained personnel with equipment.

Unsuccessful attempts were made to filter back small groups through Botswana and other territories. Beginning in August 1967, joint ANC/ZAPU guerrilla units entered Zimbabwe. In the case of the ANC contingents, it was made plain that they were en route home but their interception by Rhodesian and South African security forces led to armed engagements. Although the battles which were fought took place outside South African territory, this was MK's baptism of battle with South African military forces called in by Smith. By all accounts confirmed by enemy reports they acted with heroism and competence. But one of the prime reasons for the failure of this incursion by the joint ANC/ZAPU groups was that, within Zimbabwe, there was not the requisite level of internal organization, mass mobilization and mass support without which armed activity may easily be strangled. For the liberation movements, the Zimbabwe incursions once again underlined the need for careful political preparation of the population and for guerrilla groups to be integrated within the Community rather than functioning as isolated *foci*.

But if it remained true that armed tactics were a vital part of any future realistic advance in the struggle, the dilemma of timing still persisted. Experience of South Africa and other highly

organized police states has shown that, until the new type of action is started, it is doubtful whether political mobilization and organization can be developed beyond a certain point. Given the disillusionment of the people with the old forms of struggle, a demonstration of the liberation movement's capacity to meet and sustain the struggle in a new way is in itself a vital way of attracting organized allegiance and support. Therefore, postponing all armed activity until political mobilization and organizational reconstruction have reached a high enough level to sustain its more advanced forms would undermine the prospects of full political mobilization itself.

Military planning, as opposed to political planning) has some mechanical aspects which inevitably require certain static assumptions to be made about the future. Creating a core of trained professional armed cadres, putting them into the field with adequate logistical support, and with adequate contact to carry them through the initial period, requires long-term planning. It cannot be an overnight response to a sudden twist in the political situation. If operations go smoothly and according to plan, the beginnings of armed action will be the result of a deliberate decision. If not, they could be triggered off prematurely) as for instance by the need of the armed group to defend itself against enemy attacks as happened in the 1967-8 Zimbabwe campaign. The exact moment when actual armed action takes place, therefore, does not always coincide with the most favourable local or national situation.

In general there can be no all-embracing formula which correlates the level of all-round readiness with the precise timing of armed actions. But, despite the degree of uncertainty inherent in this type of action, a case could be made out to show that, both in the sabotage campaign and in some of the subsequent efforts' at armed activities, insufficient internal political and organizational preparation had been made to justify the chosen timing. Historically, however, the correctness, and feasibility of this general policy decision (for armed struggle) were not, and are not, dependent on the success or failure of any particular scheme or operation.¹³

We must remember also that not every success of an enemy stems from a failure or a mistake on the part of the revolutionary force. A struggle is a contest in which there are two sides. The antagonist is not a passive object which feeds only on those items foolishly thrown in its direction. It is in continuous active engagement with those who threaten it; and when it scores, it often does so from its own strength and not only from the other side's miscalculations. To engage in struggle is to invite enemy counteraction. To make certain that no blows are ever inflicted means not to engage in struggle. This is not advanced as an apologia for some of the failings cited (all of which have been publicly admitted by the liberation movements): but it emphasizes the need to see these failings in the context of real social struggle, and not just as drawing-board miscalculations.

Certainly, it is fallacious to characterize the years which followed 1961 as wasted and to attribute the setbacks solely to organizational distortions, deficiencies in planning, or ill-judged timing. The inevitable future victory will undoubtedly owe a great deal to the persistence of the liberation movement's turn to a policy of armed struggle. Had it failed to act at all, it would have disappeared as a viable agency for change. Without actions which continued to emphasize that force is vital in the struggle for people's power, it would have left the field clear for a more ready acceptance at home and abroad of a reformist rather than

a revolutionary solution. The regime's pursuit of its Bantustan policies and its endeavours, on the basis of these policies and other minor reforms, to seek an accommodation with independent Africa, would face fewer obstacles, if the potential armed alternative had not been kept alive by the persistent attempts of the liberation movement. The current resurgence of black political militancy within the country, particularly amongst the workers and youth, is primarily a response to a whole set of changing objective factors, including (in the case of the workers) the growing gap between wages and prices. But the revolutionary tradition perpetuated by the liberation movement's actions, not only played a part in this resurgence but serves to inform it with more radical aims.

THE GUERRILLA PERSPECTIVE

It is clear that the South African liberation movement's endeavour to lay a basis for sustained armed struggle is perhaps the most difficult on the whole African continent. The enemy here is in stable command of a rich and varied economy, which can finance a massive military budget, of £594 million in 1975, even at the stage when it is not required to extend itself. It has a well-trained army and para-military police force. It can draw on considerable manpower resources from amongst the overwhelming majority of the four million privileged whites, who can be expected to fight with great ferocity and conviction to sustain their privileges. In addition it has rich and influential allies to help build its military and economic potential. It faces an unarmed people historically deprived of opportunities to learn the skills of modern warfare. And it has one of the most sophisticated repressive security machines in the world. If then the employment of force is a subjective imperative, what about these objective difficulties?

The recent history of guerrilla struggle has underlined the fact that the material strength of the enemy is by no means a decisive factor. Witness the resources at the disposal of the French in Algeria; at the height of the fighting, 600,000 troops 'Were supplied and serviced by a leading industrial nation from an economic base quite outside the reach of military operations. Consider the unsurpassed superiority of pure material strength and almost limitless resources of the U.S.A. in Vietnam? Yet neither modern industrial backing, technical know-how nor fire-power swayed the balance in favour of the invaders. Grivas and his Cyprus group challenged the British Army with forty-seven rifles, twenty-seven automatic weapons and seven revolvers. ('It was with these arms and these alone that I kept the fight going for almost a year without any appreciable reinforcements.')

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Guerrilla warfare, almost by definition, posits a situation of vast imbalance in material and military resources between the opposing sides. It is designed to cope particularly with a situation in which the enemy is infinitely superior in every conventional factor of warfare. It is supremely the weapon of the materially weak against the materially strong. With a populace increasingly supporting and protecting it whilst opposing and exposing the enemy, a people's army is assured of survival and growth by skilful exercise of tactics. Surprise, mobility and tactical retreat make it difficult for the enemy to 'bring its superior fire-power into play in any decisive battles. No individual battle is fought under circumstances unfavourable to the guerrilla. Superior force can be harassed, weakened and, in the end, destroyed.

The absence of an orthodox front of fighting lines; the need of the enemy to attenuate his resources and lines of communication over vast distances; his need to protect the widely

scattered installations on which his economy is dependent (because the guerrilla pops up now here, now there): these are amongst the factors which serve in the long run, to compensate the guerrillas for their disparity in initial strength. I stress the words 'in the long run' because it would be idle to dispute that for a long time the enemy has considerable military advantages from his high level of industrialization, his ready-to-hand reserves of manpower and his excellent roads, railways and air transport which facilitate swift manoeuvre and speedy concentration of personnel.

But over a period of time, many of these very factors could begin to operate in favour of the liberation force. The resources, including food production, depend overwhelmingly upon black labour which will not remain docile and co-operative if the struggle grows in intensity. The white manpower resources, adequate initially, must become dangerously stretched as guerrilla warfare develops. The mobilization of a large force for a protracted struggle would place a further burden on the workings of the economy. The South African Director-General of Strategic Studies, General J. H. Robbertze, stressed the vulnerability of the South African economy in a paper *On the strategic implications of recent developments in South Africa*, presented to an international conference in Paris in early 1975.¹⁵ He apprehensively predicted the establishment of 'active guerrilla bases' in both Angola and Mozambique. Of South Africa's agricultural production, he declared that, 'in the event of civil war or generalized violence this intricate economic machinery will be disrupted or destroyed'. Many installations, vital power and water supplies might be disrupted with disastrous effects; mines could be flooded. All this, General Robbertze maintains, could lead directly to a virtual paralysis of industrial activity in the country.

In contrast to many other major guerrilla struggles (Cuba was one of the exceptions), the enemy's economic and manpower resources are all situated within South Africa, the theatre of war. There is no economic base area which can remain safe from sabotage, mass action and guerrilla strikes. In an underdeveloped country, the interruption of supplies to any given region may be no more than a local setback. But in a highly sensitive modern economic structure of the South African type, the successful interruption of transport to any major industrial complex would inflict immense damage on the whole economy and on the morale of the enemy. The South African forces would have the task of keeping intact about 30,000 miles of railway lines spread across an area of over 400,000 square miles.

One of the more popular misconceptions concerning guerrilla warfare is that a physical environment which conforms to a special pattern is indispensable: thick jungle, inaccessible mountain ranges, swamps, and so forth. The availability of such terrain is, to be sure, of enormous advantage to the guerrillas, especially in the early non-operational phase when training and other preparatory steps are undertaken, and no external bases are available for this purpose. However, when the operations commence, the guerrilla cannot survive, let alone flourish, unless he moves to areas where people live and work and where the enemy can be engaged in combat. If he is fortunate enough to have behind him a friendly border or areas of difficult access which can provide temporary refuge, it is of course advantageous; although it sometimes brings with it its own set of problems connected mainly with supplies. But guerrilla warfare can, and has been, successfully waged in every conceivable type of terrain: in deserts, in swamps, in farm fields, in built-up areas in plains in the bush and in countries without friendly borders.

The sole question is one of adjusting survival tactics to the sort of terrain in which operations have to be conducted. In any case, in the vast expanse that is South Africa, a people's force will find a multitude of variations in topography; deserts, mountain forests, veld, and swamps. There might not be a single impregnable Sierra Maestra or impenetrable jungle, but the country abounds in terrain which in general is certainly no less favourable for guerrilla operations than some of the terrain in which the Algerians or the resistance movements in occupied Europe operated. Tito, when told that a certain area was 'as level as the palm of your hand and with very little forests', retorted: 'What a first-class example it is of the relative unimportance of geographical factors in the development of a rising.'

In particular South Africa's great size will make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the ruling power to keep the whole of it under armed surveillance in strength and in depth. Hence, an early development of a relatively safe (though shifting) rear is not beyond the realm of possibility. The undetected existence of a SWAPO training camp inside Namibia for over a year and, more especially, the survival for years in the mountains and hills in the Transkei of the leaders of 'Intaba' during the military occupation of the area after the 1960 Pondo Revolt, support this possibility.

A LOOK AHEAD

But, theory aside, the stark reality is that after more than ten years of effort, there is as yet no evidence of any form of military engagement inside the country. Critics of the liberation movement's strategy during this period have attributed its lack of success to a combination of organizational mistakes and formidable objective obstacles. They point to the fact that since the immediate post-Sharpeville low; the regime has shown a relative economic and political stability, has strengthened its external ties, and has not faced a crisis of the proportions which normally precedes a revolutionary break-through. They question whether there are 'grounds for declaring that (the people) prefer death to oppression, the finality of annihilation to the indeterminacy of existence',¹⁶ and ask whether there is psychological readiness and a motivation amongst the Africans to use violence.¹⁷

Some academic analysts also conclude that the people's readiness to seek a solution by force seems minimal since, 'in spite of the structural violence embodied in South African society, individual violent reactions against this situation have been remarkably limited'.¹⁸ Doubt is expressed whether there are present in South Africa the very specialized conditions in which armed revolutions have made headway elsewhere.¹⁹ It is also suggested that the 'reformist option' persisted long past the point in time when a decision to shift from non-violent struggle might have stood a remote chance of possible success'.²⁰

In one form or another, all the critics stress the difficulties of an unarmed people, deprived of opportunities to learn the skills of modern warfare, engaging a powerful and highly industrialized enemy; a factor aggravated by the absence of friendly border states. Most also allude to the negative effects of exile politics in a period in which internal national leadership had been destroyed.

To recognise the validity or partial validity of some of these assessments does not imply that the armed tactic has no place in South Africa's future liberation strategy. Indeed, the ANC and its allies continue to regard the introduction of force as one of the main foundations of such a strategy. They do so for a number of reasons. In the first place (as emphasized in chapter 1) the struggle for majority rule in South Africa today has no realistic backing without it. To abandon the armed tactic is to abandon the people to forces willing to settle for the scraps of power and not its substance. However long the struggle still takes and however many lessons there are still to be learnt, it is unthinkable for South African revolutionaries, in this era, to return to struggle for reforms only within the white framework; for this is the only alternative.

The obstacles facing the liberation movement in pursuit of its strategy may have disappointed earlier hopes and defied some of the more optimistic predictions. But the defeatist conclusions of many academic analysts are static in their conception and show an onlooker's separation from the demands and processes of active revolutionary struggle. Was there any demonstrable evidence in Mozambique in 1962, when FRELIMO charted the armed path, that the mass preferred 'death to oppression' or that they were psychologically ready to use violence? Were there any more individual reactions against violence in pre-1958 Guinea-Bissau than there are in South Africa? Were the French occupiers of Algeria or the Portuguese occupiers of Angola passing through an identifiable moment of economic or political collapse when the liberation forces in these territories launched their own armed activities? Did the Cubans have a friendly border? Did none of these movements make serious tactical mistakes and were they not also, for a time, dogged by the exile syndrome?

The combination of favourable and unfavourable conditions in which each of these struggles had to be launched was different in each territory. South Africa, too, is a special case. But what is common to them all is that a people which has exhausted the 'reformist option' responds to the revolutionary one when the feasibility of hitting the enemy has been demonstrated by deeds as well as words.

Experiences have been gained and lessons learnt by the ANC and its allies. Against the background of the changing external and internal situations, a more hopeful basis is emerging for the success of a strategy which includes the factor of organized force.

Inside the country there are once again signs of a significant upswing in political awareness and militancy. This will gain momentum as the system remains incapable of overcoming the ever-recurring financial and economic crises inherent in the capitalist mode of production, and more especially as the special contradictions which flow from its internal racist-colonialist character intensify. The efforts to slow down and reverse the process of permanent black urbanization has not succeeded, and white dependence on black labour is growing inexorably.* This, together with the depressed state of black wages, has already triggered off economic struggles in the recent period which are giving the workers a renewed consciousness of their collective strength. The mining industry, so dependent on foreign labour, faces severe difficulties of labour supply and is being forced to reconsider its migratory labour policies. The creation of a more permanent black work force would, for obvious reason, strengthen the potential for class-based economic and political pressures.

**According to Dr Cyril Wyndham of the Chamber of Mines Human Science; Laboratory, by 1980 South Africa will have an economically active population of 10.4 million of which only 1.7 million will be white. Financial Mail, 2 August 1974, p. 408.*

In the Reserves a situation with enormous explosive potential is being created by the crowding into its limited area of more and more millions of impoverished, land-hungry and unemployed Africans.†

†The Government's Tomlinson Commission (1956) talked of the need to create 500,000 new jobs over a ten-year period in and around the Reserves if progress were to be made in the implementation of apartheid. According to the Government-supporting Afrikaanse Handels Instituut (Rand Daily Mail, 18 August 1973) only 8,000 new jobs had been created in all the Bantustans in the previous 10 years. In the 'border' regions the figure for the 11½ years from June 1960 to December 1972 is 78,451. Tomlinson also claimed that the Reserves, which now have a population of 7 million, could only reasonably support life for 2.3 million people even if his recommendations for development investment were carried out.

The working and student youth in particular are in search of a strategy which will begin to lay the basis of the struggle for power. At the universities and in the schools the mood is one of growing hostility to white rule. Organizations such as SASO have not only challenged government policy at the educational institutions but have involved themselves in wider political struggles.

Government attempts to gain Coloured and Indian acceptance of relatively powerless communal institutions as a substitute for direct political representation have made little headway. The Coloured Labour Party, in particular, has once again (in the March 1975 elections) won overwhelming support for its rejection of differential institutions. Indian workers in Natal showed an impressive degree of solidarity with the striking Africans, and many Indian youths have begun to play an active role in newly formed black organizations with militant anti-Apartheid postures. New attempts have been made to revive the Indian Congress movement.

But in all these areas of reawakening, it is already clear that police harassment and intimidation set a limit to the activity and growth of purely legal mass structures. Beyond the struggle for 'moderate' reforms within the framework of continuing white domination, there hovers the state's legal and administrative hatchet. Thus the renewed awareness can no longer express itself, as it could during the fifties, in sustained mass demonstrations. Nor can the struggle for power be mounted by mass legal pressures alone, although these constitute an essential ingredient in the unfolding of the struggle. Without the direct or indirect backing of offensive and defensive force and effective underground mass leadership, the limits are self-evident; but, with it, this ferment once again sets a more hopeful scene for radical political advances.

If the elusive psychological factor is to be given its place in the projection of future responses to armed activity, there can be no doubt that it has become more favourable for South Africa's liberation movement. The armed victories in the former Portuguese territories and the

perceptible progress of armed actions in Zimbabwe and in the Caprivi Strip have had a great inspirational impact on South Africa's black people: because, unlike other such victories, they have happened and are happening next door. And, as already emphasized, these events have also driven home to South Africa's ruling class the growing likelihood of internal insurgency in the not-too-distant future.

But the people's expectations and the enemy's fears aside, there can be no doubt that the dramatic transformation which has taken place in southern Africa has eliminated one of the most serious obstacles in the path of people's insurgency. South Africa is no longer cushioned by states actively hostile to the South African liberation movement. This is not to belittle South Africa's internal strength, which is shored up by direct and behind-the-scenes support from the West. Nor can we dismiss the continued possibility of 'some independent African states taking a leading part in championing the cause of what amounts to collaboration with the counter-revolution'.²¹ But despite these factors, both the internal and external balance of forces have become much more favourable to liberation endeavours. The changes that have taken place, especially on South Africa's borders, provide the more militant lobby in the OAU with renewed incentives to oppose the trend of compromise perceptible in the Lusaka Manifesto and in the recent dialogue manoeuvres.

But at the end of the day, the tendencies to support the liberation drive will only become lasting realities through the efforts of the liberation movement itself and its support groups throughout the world. Above all, the extent to which the world translates its verbal condemnation of the racist regime into significant action against it and more direct support for the liberation movement, will depend upon events inside the country.

The liberation movement recognizes that well-planned activities by its armed wing is not the only immediate perspective of struggle in South Africa. Mass political mobilization of people in the urban and rural areas is a vital ingredient and requires a combination of all methods: legal, semi-legal and clandestine. The muscle power of the black working class needs to find stronger organizational expression through the building of a powerful trade union movement. The Bantustan deception must be exposed and fought both inside and outside the so-called 'homelands'. The struggle can no longer be centred on pleas for civil rights or for reforms within the framework of white dominance; it is a struggle for people's power, in which mass ferment and the growing importance of the armed factor go hand in hand. The liberation movement points to this as the only path which can be trodden by the oppressed mass if it is not to submit permanently to white overlordship. An underground leadership presence within the country itself is the most vital element in the phase ahead, and there are signs that this is, closer than at any time since the pre-Rivonia period.

All this does not mean that the revolution is around the corner. It rather signifies that conditions for its unfolding are perhaps more favourable today than at any time this century.

Oliver Tambo, the Acting President-General of the ANC, in a speech delivered in June 1973, said:

In South Africa, the long stalemate since Rivonia is undeniably over. Everywhere in Southern Africa our struggles are gathering a new momentum and our peoples are

striking out in several directions against the Apartheid and colonialist regimes. There is no peace for the enemy. They live in a state of apprehension, doubt and fear. They no longer strut about with arrogant confidence in the permanence of their power. Instead they are now frantically directing their energies into repairing the floodgates which menacingly threaten to burst open in revolution throughout the Southern African region.²²

When Tambo spoke these words, the situation seemed on the surface less promising than he claimed. FRELIMO, MPLA, and PAI G C were still locked in struggle with Portuguese colonialism; Smith, with Vorster's backing, still clung arrogantly to his belief in the permanence of white rule in Zimbabwe; Namibia was still a routine item on the U.N. agenda; and Vorster seemed unthreatened in his racist fortress. But the turbulence below, which Tambo so correctly sensed, was to surface dramatically. Within a year Portuguese colonialism was no more. Smith was talking a less assured language while Zimbabwean guerrillas cut deep into his territory. Vorster was frantically making his gestures on 'petty Apartheid' and Namibia. Although these and other gestures were of little substance, they nevertheless marked the measure of his apprehension of things to come.

This dramatic lunge forward in the sub-continent's history was the fruit of protracted endeavour and sacrifice by the liberation movements. The unexpectedly swift change was, however, triggered off by an event thousands of miles away: the overthrow of the Fascist dictatorship in Portugal. But the apparently 'accidental' trigger of Lisbon's April Coup was, like all such 'so-called accidents', merely 'the form behind which necessity lurks.'²³

In South Africa too, struggle in the new conditions sets the scene for the fulfilment of its historical necessity – the early achievement of liberation and freedom from exploitation.